

# Singer Takes Charm to Rikers Island



The New York Times (by Michael Evans)

**Eloise Laws singing on Rikers Island to the accompaniment of the prison orchestra**

**By McCANDLISH PHILLIPS**

Eloise Laws, a sinuous singer sheathed in purple, did all she could to turn the cement block gymnasium-and-auditorium of a city prison into a nightclub yesterday afternoon, in a show for 500 male inmates on Rikers Island.

As far as the men were concerned, she was the next best thing to parole.

Miss Laws was aided in weaving the difficult illusion by a standup comedian and a 10-piece prison orchestra, by red curtains and by a full black backdrop, on which an inmate had deftly sketched in the Manhattan skyline with a few orange streaks.

The lights were dimmed, throwing some of the amenities of detention into shadow, and a spotlight came up. The guards standing along the walls—some in white shirts, some in blue, according to their rank—did not look very much like waiters, but a paunchy guard at the back was no less courteous than a maitre d' greeting a small tipper.

The orchestra improvised some jazz and, with the music and the chatter, only the clink of glasses was missing. The drummer sat on a milk can with a piece of foam

rubber over its open top.

Miss Laws, a willowy black singer out of the South who still seems to have a little of the sweet dew of Texas upon her, wowed them merely by walking on stage. She is slender and comely and young and starry-eyed. She has the high-cheekbones and small, carefully chiseled features of good Greek sculpture.

Cosmetics would only hide a smooth complexion, but Miss Laws had taken care to paint her tongue green. The guards along the walls were no less rapt than the men in denim who sat in tightly packed rows. She sang "Wedding Bell Blues," "I'll Never Fall in Love Again," and other laments to unrequited love of the sort she delivers in some of the costlier hotel supper club rooms.

The comedian, Rodney Dangerfield, came on with the line: "It's a pleasure to be here. I figure this is one audience that's not going to walk out on me."

The 48-year-old comic, who has been making it big on television spots the last couple of years, recalls the days of his youth as Jack Roy, when he could never be sure the people would not walk out.

Mr. Dangerfield is a thick-

voiced player with a worried look, who specializes in the humor of inferiority and self-persecution. He's had second billing in clubs where "the star of the show was a rabies-infected dog act," he said.

His kid goes to a rough school. When he went to see the guidance counselor, he was out:

"They told me he'll be back in one to three years," he said.

He won quick favor with a series of mildly anti-cop jokes: "I know a cop who's so tough he fired three warning shots—into the guy he was warning."

When the two came back for bows, escorted by Carl Warwick, music director of the prison, the men gave them a long burst of whistling, shrieking applause, and when Warden Francis R. Buno came on to say thank you, they applauded him, too.

Bob Taylor, an inmate, presented the singer with a framed portrait in pastels. He had drawn it from pictures of her. She gave him in return a kiss on the cheek. Visitors were strictly forbidden by guards to talk to prisoners of the New York City Correctional Institution for Men, population 2,100.